DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 215 562 FL 012 826

AUTHOR Soudek, Lev I.
TITLE The Lexicon and Word Formation in Language Teaching.
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Joint Midwest TESOL Conference (1st) and the Illinois TESOL/BE Conference (9th, Champaign-Urbana, IL, April 3-4, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *English (Second Language); Higher Education; Secondary Education; *Second Language Instruction; *Semantics; *Vocabulary; Word Recognition; Word Study Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Word Formation

ABSTRACT

A recent study of neologisms has restated the prominent position of the lexicon from a linguistic point of view. From the perspective of language teachers, it is evident that an adequate vocabulary plays a crucial role in the ability to communicate in a foreign language. The fact that the lexicon is a major component of a language has caused the demand that vocabulary teaching be restored to a more prominent position in language-teaching curricula. One focus, of interest to ESL teachers, is the area of word formation in English. Because word formation provides essential clues for word recognition, language teachers should be prepared to teach the basic rules of productive word-forming processes. According to a number of sources, the five most productive types of word formation in present day English are affixation, compounding, clipping, conversion, and blending. Studies suggest that different instructional strategies snould be placed in the foreground in teaching vocabulary at different proficiency levels. While basic students learn from selective listening, songs, rhymes, and drills, more advanced learners would be better served by synonym and antonym exercises and with clusters of contextualized vocabulary arranged according to situational or semantic categories. (AMH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED215562

The Lexicon and Word Formation in Language Teaching

Lev I. Soudek

The article stresses the central role of the lexicon in the system of language and documents the need of reintroducing active and systematic vocabulary instruction in TESOL curricula.

The main focus is on teaching productive types of English word formation. Based on recent studies of neologisms, the five most productive word-forming processes are discussed and exemplified for TESOL purposes in order of descending productivity: affixation, compounding, clipping, conversion, and blending.

Finally, some new sources on methods and techniques of vocabulary instruction and of teaching the processes of English word formation are briefly characterized.

In their understandable enthusiasm for the systematic, rule-governed, character of language, theoretical linguists as well as language teachers have been fascinated by sound-pattern symmetries in phonology, phrase-structure rules and transformations in syntax, and feature matrices in semantics. Such an atmosphere has not favored theoretical studies in morphology and lexicology, neither has it fostered lexicon-oriented research and applications related to language teaching.

In some theoretical models of language the lexicon is treated as a minor, not so interesting, part of the language system, a part that sometimes seems to be needed only because one cannot generate wordless sentences. These attitudes

---

Mr. Soudek is Professor of English Linguistics and coordinator of graduate programs in TESOL and linguistics at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb. He has published a book and several articles on English word formation. His papers and reviews on topics in TESOL and applied linguistics have appeared in the English Language Teaching Journal (England), the TESOL Quarterly, and the TESOL Newsletter.

FL012826

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Lev I. Soudek

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

have found their parallels in language-teaching methodologies where vocabulary teaching has been assigned low or no priority, with the main focus placed on pronunciation drills, sentence patterns, and syntactic structures. Until recently, active vocabulary expansion was not stressed at all; it was assumed that the vocabulary would grow automatically, as a by-product of practicing other language skills. Many language teachers still believe that there should be no direct and massive vocabulary instruction, that listening and speaking, reading and writing, together with a carefully regulated vocabulary flow in textbooks based on word-frequency counts is all that is needed to stimulate natural vocabulary growth.

In his recent study of neologisms, Algeo(1980:273) has restated the prominent position of the lexicon from a linguistic point of view: "In a sense, the lexicon is the center of a linguistic system, where phonology, syntax, and semantics come together." And, indeed, from the perspective of language teachers (and former learners of foreign languages) we are often painfully aware of the crucial role of an adequate vocabulary for communicating in the second language. We notice every day how the "narrow" vocabularies of our foreign students restrict their ranges of communication, how their brains scan for "equivalents" in their mental bilingual word lists and how, having found no matching word or phrase, they have to resort to strategies of lexical evasion or even total avoidance of certain themes, registers or entire speech situations.

The objective fact that the lexicon is a major component of the language to be learned has caused several authors to demand that vocabulary teaching (which, in a crude form and without modern methodologies, was an important ingredient of the "grammar-translation" method for ages) be restored to the position it deserves in language-teaching curricula. Twaddell(1973) has noted that the foreign learner, at the transition into the intermediate stage, "has a truly tiny vocabulary; any normal child of six has a vocabulary many times larger. And this is the persistent

problem of learning and teaching on the intermediate level: an infantile vocabulary and an adult mentality."(64-65) He stresses the need of a systematic "build-up of vocabulary resources" and appears to be the first to have used the term "massive vocabulary expansion." Richards(1976) considers the active role of the lexicon in a TESOL curriculum in the light of theoretical and applied linguistic aspects of "word knowledge." He, too, suggests (84) that "a major feature of a second language program should be a component of massive vocabulary expansion." One of the best articulated pleas for reintroducing direct vocabulary teaching in TESOL is by Judd(1978). In his opinion, "the status of lexical knowledge should be given greater emphasis in TESOL programs"(71) and students "need more diversified lexical knowledge."(73) Unlike Twaddell who believes that massive vocabulary instruction belongs in the intermediate and advanced learning phases, Judd calls for a much earlier introduction of direct vocabulary teaching which should be systematically and logically organized. The importance of vocabulary teaching in TESOL is also emphasized in good contributions by Celce-Murcia and Rosensweig(1979:242) and by Robinett(1980:133).

An important domain of the lexical system of English that yields itself to systematic study and logical organization is the area of word formation. From a practical point of view, word-formation study not only shows how new words are manufactured, it also tells language teachers and their students much about the make-up of tens of thousands of current words in the lexicon of English. Most of the words entering the language have done so and, apparently, will be doing so in a finite number of more or less regular ways that can be described and categorized.

Language teachers ought to be thoroughly familiar with what Marchand(1969) calls the categories and types of word formation. They should know how the word-making system of English works, which types are highly productive, mildly

productive or only marginal. As word formation provides essential clues for word recognition (both lexical and syntactic) to foreign students, language teachers should be prepared to teach the basic rules of productive word-forming processes.

Besides Marchand's excellent work quoted above, thorough information on English word formation will be found in Adams(1973, see also Soudek's 1977 review of her book). Many useful studies are cited in Stein's bibliography(1973). For transformationalist views of word formation, usually restricted to affixation, the most representative is Halle's article(1973) and a well-researched monograph by Aronoff(1976, see also Carrier's 1979 review). Very useful and cogent presentations of productive word-forming types are included in Bolinger(1975, chapter "Lexicon"), Robinett(1980, chapter "The Vocabulary System"), Stageberg(1981, chapter "Processes of Word Formation"), as well as in some specialized studies quoted in the references below.

Several authors have studied the productivity of individual word-forming types in various areas of the lexicon of English. Soudek(1967) established detailed taxonomies and productivity lists on the basis of word-forming patterns in non-standard British and American English. Caso(1980) has examined 4300 new words in several branches of physics and the earth sciences. His article and, especially, his dissertation(1976) should be of interest for specialists working in the area of English in Science and Technology. In a recent study, Algeo(1980) has established productivity figures for most types of English word formation. He bases his calculations on a thorough examination of 1000 neologisms taken from the Barnhart Dictionary of New English(1973).

Leaving aside borrowings (loanwords) taken from other languages, as well as semantic shifts where existing words are given changed meanings or additional semantic loads, the five most productive types of word formation in present-day

English are (in order of descending productivity): affixation, compounding, clipping, conversion, and blending.

In affixation (affix derivation), words made with suffixes slightly preponderate over prefixed units. Both suffixation and prefixation are crucial for the foreign learner of English; in this respect, see, for instance, Twaddell(1973: 74) and Richards(1976:81-82). For effective teaching, suffixes can be arranged in order of decreasing productivity and according to their noun-forming, verb-forming, adjective-forming or adverb-forming functions. Some new and highly productive suffix forms, such as -burger, -teria, -thon, also deserve active teaching.

There is not much to be explicitly taught about compounding and its many fascinating subtypes, except for the fact that combining two or more full free bases to form new words with new meanings is a highly prolific word-forming process in modern English. The often whimsical character of English typographical conventions should be mentioned with compounds which are sometimes hyphenated, written as one word or written as two separate units.

Clipping which is especially frequent in informal registers may involve various types of abbreviations (first parts retained as in examination, advertisement, laboratory; central parts in influenza, refri/d/gerator; final parts in omnibus, telephone). Some distinct and very frequent subgroups of clipping are initialisms (CIA, IRS, ERA) and orthoepic acronyms (radar = radio detecting and ranging, sam = surface to air missile). The latter subgroup contains a growing number of intentional formations where the new acronym word is identical with an existing word that somehow relates to the general purpose of the organization (AIM = American Indian Movement, NOW = National Organization of Women, GASP = Group Against Smokers Pollution, MAD = Movement Against the Draft). Such forms are so important that they almost have to be taught as part of what some language teachers call "American Life and Institutions."

Conversion (zero-derivation, functional shift) is a particular and flexible feature of English word formation which makes it possible for members of one word class to be converted into another part of speech without adding suffixes. Nouns will change into verbs (to petition, to father), verbs into nouns (a find, an edit), adjectives into verbs (to tame, to better), and so on. Slot-and-filler exercises with function words and other grammatical signals retained but nouns (or verbs, adjectives, adverbs) left out can illustrate this useful phenomenon.

Finally, blending (telescoping) is an umbrella term for several interesting subtypes where splinters of two source words can be fused in various ways, sometimes with overlapping centers, to create new amalgamated units with varying degrees of transparency (stagflation = stagnation+inflation, stroft = strong+soft, frogurt = frozen+yogurt). Detailed treatments of blending, with subcategorizations and examples, can be found in Algeo(1977) and Soudek(1978).

In this concluding part, a few sources on methods and techniques of vocabulary instruction and of teaching the processes of word formation will be mentioned. In a study that could have far-reaching implications, Henning(1973) found that while low-proficiency learners seem to remember vocabulary items more on the basis of their acoustic and orthographic similarities, learners who have reached higher levels of proficiency seem to rely much more on associated meanings in remembering the vocabulary of a second language. This suggests that different instructional strategies should be placed in the foreground in teaching vocabulary at different proficiency levels: for basic students selective listening, songs, rhymes, morphological drills, prefix and suffix puzzles and spelling exercises should be used predominantly. The more advanced learners would apparently be better served with synonym and antonym exercises, and with clusters of contextualized vocabulary arranged according to situational or semantic categories. Restricted to a sample

area of English and Spanish clothing terms, Nilsen's study(1976) has shown the importance of paradigmatic orderings, within semantic fields, in vocabulary teaching. In his approach to vocabulary clusters in two languages Nilsen uses the term "contrastive semantics."

Richards(1976:88) has proposed, among other teaching techniques, the use of the CLOZE procedure as "perhaps one of the most useful exercises to deal globally with many of the aspects of word knowledge." The present writer has seen several simple and quick but highly effective variations of CLOZE used successfully in teaching word-formation processes in ESL. Celce-Murcia and Rosensweig(1979) discuss several useful procedures and exercises designed for active vocabulary teaching. A whole section (252-4) of their presentation is devoted to "Teaching the Productive Processes of Word Formation." Robinett(1980:134-140) presents excellent examples of exercises related specifically to word formation, as well as to general vocabulary teaching. Schinke(1979)has recently published an excellent book full of vocabulary games for ESL/EFL learners. Many of her exercises are relevant to English word formation.

Our notes on the crucial role of the lexicon in language and on the systematic character of most of the word-forming processes in English are mainly intended to direct the attention of language teachers towards new sources of information in an area that has been relatively neglected in language pedagogy. How much of that information should be presented explicitly in a given TESOL curriculum, and in what sequence, will depend on age and proficiency levels as well as on concrete teaching objectives.

REFERENCES

Adams, Valerie. 1973. An Introduction to Modern English Word-Formation.(English Language Series No.7) London: Longman Group Ltd.

Algeo, John. 1977. Blends, a Structural and Systemic View. American Speech 52, 1-2:47-64.

_____. 1978. The Taxonomy of Word Making. Word 29:122-131.

_____. 1980. Where Do All the New Words Come From? American Speech 55,4:264-277.

Aronoff, Mark. 1976. Word Formation in Generative Grammar. Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press.

Barnhart, Clarence L. et al. 1973. The Barnhart Dictionary of New English Since 1963. Bronxville, New York: Barnhart/Harper & Row.

Baxter, James. 1980. The Dictionary and Vocabulary Behavior: A Single Word or a Handful? TESOL Quartely 14, 3:325-336.

Bolinger, Dwight. 1975. Aspects of Language.(See especially Chapter 5: Lexicon) New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. 2nd edition.

Bryant, Margaret M. 1974. Blends Are Increasing. American Speech 49, 3-4:163-184.

Carrier, Jill. 1979. (Review of) Word formation in generative grammar. By Mark Aronoff. Language 55, 2:415-423.

Caso, Arthur L. 1976. Sources of Selected Modern Scientific Terms with a Typology of English Lexical Processes. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Department of English, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois.

_____. 1980. The Production of New Scientific Terms. American Speech 55, 2:101-111.

Celce-Murcia, Marianne and Fred Rosensweig. 1979. Teaching Vocabulary in the ESL Classroom. In Celce-Murcia and McIntosh (eds.), Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.

Halle, Morris. 1973. Prolegomena to a Theory of Word Formation. Linguistic Inquiry 4, 1:3-16.

Henning, Grant H. 1973. Remembering Foreign Language Vocabulary: Acoustic and Semantic Parameters. Language Learning 23, 2:185-196.

Judd, Elliott L. 1978. Vocabulary Teaching and TESOL: A Need for Reevaluation of Existing Assumptions. TESOL Quarterly 12, 1:71-76.

Makkai, Adam. 1974. Acronymy in English. In Proceedings of the Eleventh International Congress of Linguists I. Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 345-363.

Marchand, Hans. 1969. The Categories and Types of Present-Day English Word-Formation. (Second, completely revised and enlarged edition.) München: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung.

_____. 1974. Studies in Syntax and Word-Formation. (Selected Articles by Hans Marchand, Edited by Dieter Kastovsky.) München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag.

Maurer, David W. and Ellesa Clay High. 1980. New Words--Where Do They Come From and Where Do They Go? American Speech 55, 3:185-194.

Nilsen. Don L.F. 1976. Contrastive Sematics in Vocabulary Instruction. TESOL Quarterly 10, 1:99-103.

Richards, Jack C. 1976. The Role of Vocabulary Teaching. TESOL Quarterly 10, 1:77-89.

Robinett, Betty Wallace. 1980. Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages: Substance and Technique. Second paperback printing. (See Chapter 3: The Vocabulary System.) University of Minnesota Press and McGraw-Hill.

Schinke, Linda. 1979. Vocabulary Games for Beginning/Intermediate English Language Learners. National Textbook Company.

Soudek, Lev I. 1967. Structure of Substandard Words in British and American English. Bratislava: Slovak Academy of Sciences.

_____. 1971. The Development and Use of the Morpheme burger in American English. Linguistics 68:61-89.

_____. 1977. (Review of) Valerie Adams, An Introduction to Modern English Word-Formation. Linguistics 194:93-96.

_____. 1978. The Relation of Blending to English Word-Formation: Theory, Structure, and Typological Attempts. In Proceedings of the Twelfth International Congress of Linguists. Innsbruck: Universität Innsbruck.

Stageberg, Norman C. 1981. An Introductory English Grammar. Fourth edition. (See Chapter 9: Words, Chapter 10: Processes of Word Formation) New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Stein, Gabriele. 1973. English Word-Formation Over Two Centuries. (In Honour of Hans Marchand on the Occasion of his Sixty- Fifth Birthday.) Tübingen: Tübinger Beiträge zur Linguistik.

Twaddell, Freeman. 1973. Vocabulary Expansion in the TESOL Classroom. TESOL Quarterly 7, 1:61-78.